DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 227 396 CG 016 528

AUTHOR Sabatelli, Ronald M.; And Others
TITLE Marital Cohesiveness and Family Life Transitions: A Social Exchange Perspective.
PUB DATE Oct 82
NOTE 26p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Council on Family Relations (Washington, DC, October 13-16, 1982).
PUB TYPE Reports - General (140) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Information Analyses (070)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Family Life; Family Relationship; Individual Needs; Interpersonal Attraction; Interpersonal Relationship; Literature Reviews; *Marital Instability; Models; *Social Exchange Theory; Spouses
IDENTIFIERS *Life Transitions; *Marital Satisfaction

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the impact of individual and family life transitions on marital relationships from a social exchange perspective. The first section of the paper reviews and integrates several social exchange perspectives, derived from both sociological and social psychological traditions, in particular the works of Thibaut and Kelly (1959), Levinger and Huesmann (1980), Scanzoni (1979), and Altman and Taylor (1973), and reformulates the exchange model as applied to marital relationships. The second section of the paper discusses the potential impact of individual and family life transitions on relationship interdependence, commitment, and stabilty or cohesion. The role of commitment as a feedback mechanism providing information about both the level of relational interdependence and the potential for rewards in alternative relationships is explored. (PAS)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED227396

Marital Cohesiveness and Family Life Transitions: A Social Exchange Perspective

Ronald M. Sabatelli, Erin Cecil-Pigo, & John Pearce

The University of Wisconsin-Madison

Paper Presented at the

National Council of Family Relations

Theory and Methodology Workshop

October 1982

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Ronald M. Sabatelli

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

CG 016528

Ronald M. Sabatelli, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor
Child and Family Studies
University of Wisconsin
1300 Linden Drive
Madison, WI 53706

This paper will examine the impact of individual and family life transitions on marital relationships from a social exchange perspective. The original impetus for this paper evolved out of our fascination with why some relationships endure over time, at times in spite of low levels of relationship satisfaction, while others do not. To address this issue, we originally focused on the mediating effects of transitional stresses on relationship quality and stability, but were unable to adequately link the concepts of stress and transition to the question of why some relationships endure while others do not. It was clear to us that in order to examine these issues more thoroughly some theoretical means of understanding the issues of stability and change in relationships over time was needed.

To this end, the social exchange paradigm was explored as to the degree that it met these criteria. Hence, the first part of this paper deals with a review, critique, and reformulation of the exchange model as applied to marital relationships. In the process of doing this, the social exchange constructs of relational interdependence and commitment will be highlighted. The latter part of this paper deals with the potential impacts of individual and family life transitions on relationship interdependence, commitment, and stability or cohesion.

Social Exchange and the Formation, Maintenance, and Breakdown of Intimate Relationships

The major thrust of this section will be the examination and integration of several social exchange perspectives into a comprehensive model of dyadic cohesion. Cohesion is defined as a property of a group that refers to its capacity to resist dissolution. As such, cohesion can be formally defined as the resultant of forces acting on members of a group (or dyad) to remain in, or exit from, the group. It was chosen here as a central construct because, as the definition implies, there are a multitude of factors that contribute to the population of a group remaining stable over time.

In order to theoretically examine the variables contributing to dyadic cohesion, several social exchange perspectives, derived from both sociological and social psychological traditions will be reviewed and integrated. In particular, the works of Thibaut and Kelley (1959), Levinger and Huesmann (1980), Scanzoni (1979), and Altman and Taylor (1973), among others are considered of central importance in that they all stress the developmental nature of relationships while specifying a variety of factors that contribute to relationships being perceived as rewarding and/or stable. Essentially, the paper will develop the view that dyadic cohesion, as derived from these perspectives, results from the members of the dyad experiencing a sufficiently high level of relationship interdependence and commitment. The paper will further seek to define these component aspects by reviewing and integrating the exchange literature.

Social Exchange and Interpersonal Attraction

Exchange theories are a specific case of theories of individual and collective choice (March, 1970). In other words, exchange theories are concerned with the process by which groups or individuals decide to pursue a particular course of action. For the most part, exchange principles have been applied to the interpersonal attraction process (for example, see Walster, Berschied, & Walster, 1976; Huesmann & Levinger, 1976; Levinger & Huesmann, 1980). Applied to the intimate interpersonal realm, the basic tenets of exchange theory suggest that people choose one person over another if the one offers more profitable outcomes. It is important to note, however, that what constitutes a rewarding interaction is not based exclusively on the characteristics of the interacting other, but has to do with other factors such as the frequency of reward, the value of the rewarding activity, satiation, scarcity, and fatigue. To this end, Levinger and Huesmann (1980) suggest that in the course of social interaction specific behavioral rewards and relational rewards (i.e., rewards that are derived from the nature and quality of the interaction rather than from the specific behaviors of the interacting other) help interactants to predict potential future rewards. When the potential for future rewards is judged sufficiently high, the relationship continues to develop. Altman and Taylor's (1973) Social Penetration Theory accounts for developing intimacy in relationships using a similar exchange model.

In addition, Homans (1964) suggests that rewarding interactions are ones in which rewards are distributed judiciously. In this regard, distributive justice refers to the supposition that people believe that the rewards to participants in interaction should be proportional to their investments. Distributive justice, then, refers to an individual's subjective impressions of the amount of rewards that ought to result from a given amount of investment in a relationship. The norm of distributive justice serves as the basis for the development of the equity theories of interpersonal functioning (see Adams, 1965; Walster et al., 1976).

Adams (1965) developed distributive justice into an early version of Equity Theory by proposing that one's ratios of outcomes to inputs needs to be equal for interactants to perceive their relationship as rewarding. Walster et al. (1976) furthered this view by suggesting that inequity in relationships creates stress for both interactants. Interactants in inequitable relationships will attempt to eliminate their distress by taking actions to restore equity if possible. In other words, dating partners form beliefs about the amount of intimacy that should be derived from a relationship for the amount invested in that relationship. When the rule of distributive justice or equity is violated, stress results and the person in the disadvantageous position is likely to experience anger, complain about the relationship and, perhaps, ultimately, leave the relationship.

To their credit, Hatfield and her colleagues (Hatfield, Utne, & Traupmann, 1979) have attempted to operationalize Equity Theory by developing measures to assess the balance of inputs and outcomes in relationships. This approach, however, seems to suggest that

fairness or equity is of utmost importance in determining the degree of satisfaction a person has with their intimate relationships. It is suggested here, following the exchange paradigm, that fairness is simply one factor that goes into peoples' assessments of their relationships. It may be that in some areas of an interpersonal relationship stress results from inequities while in other areas of dyadic concern inequities are expected. In addition, viewing equity or distributive justice as a quantifiable, objective fact seems to overlook the emphasis that Homans placed on the subjective assessment of the distribution of rewards.

In other words, the notion of distributive justice as introduced by Homans, offers insight into an important dimension of the exchange process; that is, the exchange process, to a large extent, is guided by the subjective impressions an individual has of both self's and other's rewards and costs in the relationship. This subjective component of the exchange process is further elaborated by Thibaut and Kelley (1959) and Kelley and Thibaut (1978) in their Theory of Interdependence.

The most interesting aspect of the Theory of Interdependence stems from Thibaut and Kelley's analysis of how relationships are evaluated and thus continued or terminated. They make the strong assumpton that the reward—punishment value of an outcome must always be calculated with reference to an interactant's expectations (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). They go on to propose two alternative bases for deriving outcome values.

The first of these processes is the individual's Comparison Level (CL), which they define as the average value of all the outcomes known to a person, each outcome weighted by its salience. Each individual comes to a relationship with a backlog of experiences in other relationships and knowledge concerning other relationships based upon observations. All of this information forms a standard against which the present relationship is judged. All characteristics of a given relationship are not weighted equally, however, as some will be more salient than others.

Thus, a CL is the standard by which people evaluate the level of satisfaction with their outcomes. Outcomes above CL are felt to be pleasant; outcomes below CL unpleasant. An individual's CL is based upon their observations of others in similar situations and prior experiences. However, the construct of CL by itself does not explain why people form or maintain relationships. To this end, Thibaut and Kelley introduce the construct of Comparison Level for Alternatives (CL alt).

A CL alt is defined as the best currently available alternative to the present relationship. This is to suggest that the CL alt refers to the lowest level of outcomes that is equal or superior to those a person could obtain from some available social relationship or situation. The less the average outcomes in the present relationship exceed the average available in the best alternative relationship (the smaller it is relative to CL alt), the more the person will be tempted to disrupt or leave the present relationship. It is important to note here, as well, that a person may stay in a relationship with outcomes below CL if there are not better alternatives. This type of relationship is termed a nonvoluntary

relationship by Thibaut and Kelley.

Consequently, Thibaut and Kelley suggest that the level of outcomes received relative to CL define the individual's degree of attraction to the relationship. Concommitantly, the level of outcomes relative to CL alt define the level of dependence on the relationship. Thus, according to Thibaut and Kelley, relationships vary in the degree to which a person is both attracted to and dependent upon the relationship. In other words, by comparing the outcomes derived from a relationship (the relative amount of rewards minus costs) to a person's CL and CL alt, we get some insight into the degree of satisfaction and dependence experienced in the relationship and, thus, some insight into the stability of the relationship. Figure 1, adapted from Roloff (1981), contains the six possible combinations of outcomes and comparison levels.

FIGURE 1

The Relationship Between Outcomes, Comparison Level, and Comparison Level for Alternatives and Satisfaction and Stability

Relationship 1:	O > CL > CL alt	= Satisfying & Stable
Relationship 2:	O > CL alt > CL	= Satisfying & Stable
Relationship 3:	CL > O > CL alt	= Unsatisfying & Stable
Relationship 4:	CL > CL alt > O	= Unsatisfying & Unstable
Relationship 5:	CL alt > CL > O	= Unsatisfying & Unstable
Relationship 6:	CL alt > O > CL	= Satisfying & Unstable

O = Outcomes
CL = Comparison Level
CL alt = Comparison Level for Alternatives
> = Greater Than

We see in Relationship 1 that the outcomes are greater than the comparison level resulting in satisfaction with the relationship. To some degree, the person is also dependent upon the relationship because the outcomes available are also greater than those available in an alternative relationship thus making the relationship stable. The degree of dependency on the relationship is what differentiates Relationship 2 from Relationship 1 in that alternative relationships offer greater rewards than is ordinarily expected. If this relationship is ended, in other words, other acceptable relationships exists whereas this is not the case in Relationship 1.

In Relationship 3, the person's expectations about relational outcomes are higher than the outcomes experienced making the relationship unsatisfying. Yet, the person is nonetheless dependent upon the relationship because the person perceives that outcomes are better than those from alternative relationships. Thus, the relationship is stable and termed nonvoluntary, by Thibaut and Kelley, because of the high degree of dependency and dissatisfaction. In contrast, Relationship 4 involves a person who is also dissatisfied, but because the person is not dependent upon the relationship, better than expected outcomes are available in alternative relationships, the relationship is unstable instead of stable.

Relationships 5 and 6 are the equivalent of no relationship in that in each case rewards from alternatives are greater than current outcomes and expected outcomes. In both instances, the level of dependence on the relationship is low, making the relationships unstable. They differ only in that in Relationship 5 the person is also dissatisfied with the relationship while in Relationship 6 the person is satisfied with the relational outcomes because they are greater than expected.

In addition to their highlighting the importance of comparative processes, Kelley and Thibaut (1978), in their latest work, provide a detailed analysis of the process of relational development. They suggest that initial exchanges are evaluated both in terms of the immediate rewards they provide and the potential for future rewards as well. When the potential for future rewards is judged to be sufficiently high, individuals seek to negotiate or evolve a more stable exchange pattern based upon developing their interdependence. This interdependency is sought in order to guarantee the continuation of both high levels of rewards and fairness in the distribution of rewards to both interactants over time. These latter stages of relational development, according to Kelley and Thibaut, are outlined as follows:

I. After initial exchanges, a person may decide to move further into the relationship if there exists the belief that the relationship will be rewarding, nonexploitive, and continuing. The exchange partner is thought to be dependent upon the relationship, to have a similar interest in the relationship, and thus is expected to act to provide mutual benefits.

II. At the next level of involvement, the person feels compelled to assure the other that rewards will be provided and the other will not be exploited or abandoned. Such assurances often involve statements which indicate that one is also dependent upon the relationship, has a similar interest in it, and will act for their mutual benefit.

III. If all has gone well, Step III involves a commitment to the exchange relationship. The interactants agree to expand the exchanges and publically commit themselves to the relationship. As a result of public commitment, alternative or competing relationships are discouraged and society becomes obligated to help the relationship. It is at this stage that the intention to marry is often proclaimed.

IV. This last stage of relational development is the point at which couples solidify their interdependence by mutually agreeing that future exchanges will be equitable and dependable.

In other words, exchanges proceed from those with a strict interest in immediate gratifications to those concerned with maintaining a sufficiently high level of rewards over the long run. In order to do this, various bargains are struck that are intended to convey the information that the relationship will be nonexploitative, equitable, dependable, as well as rewarding. Nonexploitative, equitable, dependable, and rewarding relationships are characterized as interdependent. Interdependent relationships are thought to be stable because the outcomes available are above what is expected and available in alternatives. A reduction in the level of interdependence experienced, due to changes in the satisfaction with, the equity in, and/or the nonexploitativeness of the relationship may result in the relationship becoming unstable if better alternatives are available.

Scanzoni (1979), Altman and Taylor (1973), and Levinger (1974, 1977, 1979) propose similar models where the overall process of relational development is guided by experiencing immediate rewards above one's CL and CL alt while concommitantly forecasting the continuation of these rewards into the future. In these models, as is true with the model proposed by Kelley and Thibaut, a point is reached in a relationship where the focus shifts from a strict emphasis on personal gains and rewards to an interest in extending the payoffs over time in an equitable and dependable fashion. In order to do this, some bargains are struck, Scanzoni (1979) refers to this as a process of negotiation, whereby exchange partners seek to enhance their interdependence.

Levinger (1979), in addition, calls attention to the fact that relationships do not necessarily continue to grow. He argues, instead, that once having reached an interdependent level of relatedness, most relationships decline rather than expand. He has suggested that declining attractions for one's relational partner, rising alternative attractions, and declining barriers to relational dissolution (i.e., the costs of ending a relationship) are processes which contribute to the decline of intimate relationships.

It is clear that social psychologists concerned with the formation, maintenance, and breakdown of intimate relationships have moved the exchange paradigm beyond the strict emphasis on rewards and costs. It is clear, as well, based upon these perspectives, that rewards and costs function as a factor in the attraction to a relationship both initially and throughout its duration, but that interdependence is the essential construct that differentiates less committed relationships from those characterized by greater cohesion. Indeed Kelley (1967), in his presidential address to APA over 15 years ago, emphasized when referring to the Thibaut and Kelley framework, that "interdependence is the central concept in this approach, not rewards and costs." Kelley goes on to assert:

> Rewards and costs, or some similar concepts of outcomes, payoff, or reinforcement, are necessary for the analysis of interdependence, but I do not regard it as the task of the

> social psychologist to solve the conceptual and measurement problems associated with this component of the analysis. If he does so concern himself, the social psychologist will not be likely to be able, in the foreseeable future, to get on with his analysis of the intrinsically social psychological aspects of . . . "interdependence" . . .

However, as we turn our attention to the attempts to apply the social exchange paradigm to marriage relationships, Kelley's advice has often gone unheeded. It will be our contention, as we examine the attempts at applying exchange principles to marriage relationships, that these perspectives have not kept pace with current developments in exchange theory. For the most part, these approaches focus too heavily on the reward/cost constructs while ignoring the constructs of interdependence and commitment.

Social Exchange and Marital Relationships

For the most part, the applications of the social exchange paradigm to marital relationships has focused on the issues of marital satisfaction or quality and stability (Nye, 1982; Lewis & Spanier, 1982, 1979). Utilizing the social exchange paradigm of Thibaut and Kelley (1959) and drawing on the works of Levinger (1979) on marital cohesion, Nye suggests that the degree of marital satisfaction experienced in a dyad is reflected in the evaluative outcomes available to the interactants, which are the result of the rewards minus costs in the marriage weighed against what individuals feel they deserve. Concomitantly, marital stability is determined by the degree of positive affect toward spouses (satisfaction), the unattractiveness of alternatives to marriage, and the constraints against the dissolution of the marriage.

Lewis and Spanier (1982) further formalize this view and suggest the following social exchange propositons in their Theory of Marital Quality and Stability:

1. The greater the dyadic rewards (costs being equal), the greater the marital quality.

2. The greater the dyadic costs (rewards being equal), the less the marital quality.

3. The greater the external rewards (outside, alternative attractions), the less the marital stability.

4. The greater the external costs of breaking up (normative constraints to remain married), the greater the marital stability.

5. The greater the marital quality, the greater the marital stability.

In other words, according to Lewis and Spanier, marital quality is positively influenced by intradyadic rewards (attractions and bonds), but influenced negatively by intradyadic costs (tensions and conflicts). With regards to marital stability, the two persons are

kept together as a marital dyad in part by external costs (the social pressures to remain married) and are tempted by external rewards (alternative attractions). In a way, similar to Kelley and Thibaut (1978), Lewis and Spanier suggest that, at any one point in time, a marital relationship may be characterized as more or less being of:

I. High quality and high stability
II. High quality and low stability
III. Low quality and low stability
IV. Low quality and high stability

In addition, Lewis and Spanier call attention to the fact that couples, over time, may move from one quadrant to another point in the same quadrant or even into another quadrant, "depending upon the balance between the rewards and costs on the intradyadic dimension and the balance between the costs and rewards extended to the dyad."

Critique of the Social Exchange Views of Marriage Relationships

In reviewing these attempts to apply social exchange principles to marital quality and stability, we have become aware of several important limitations. To begin with, the construct of comparison level, central to Thibaut and Kelley's work on interpersonal attraction, does not seem to be adequately utilized and developed in the works of Nye and Lewis and Spanier.

Essentially, all of these authors make the assertion that rewards and costs are evaluated against some internalized standard of what one believes one expects or deserves. This is to suggest that what makes an interaction rewarding is as much some function of one's expectations as well as the rewarding properties of one's partner. This subjectiveness is noted by Lewis and Spanier when they refer to the fact that people may distort the rewards and costs perceived by actual partners when compared to more objective observations. This leads them to suggest the need to include the CL in the process of theorizing about the quality of relationships as an "essential constant . . . since it is a vital phenomenological element for evaluating the quality of particular marriages (Lewis & Spanier, 1982)."

They go on to suggest that the factors contributing to marital quality can be expressed in the following mathematical form:

$$MQ = (IR \times CL) - (IC \times CL)$$

In this view, marital quality equals the intradyadic rewards (IR) in a marriage times the comparison levels of rewards for spouses (CL) minus the intradyadic costs (IC) times the comparison levels of costs for spouse (CL).

It is in the use of the CL construct in their mathematical equation, however, that Lewis and Spanier seem to make a conceptual error by suggesting that the rewards and costs experienced in a relationship are multiplied by some constant, the CL. It would seem to be more parsimonious with the exchange paradigm, as suggested by Sabatelli (1981), to depict marital quality as some function of the outcomes

one feels one deserves (CL) subtracted from the outcomes experienced (Outcomes = Rewards - Costs). In this way, as suggested by Thibaut and Kelley, if the outcomes one experiences fall above the CL (O > CL) the relationship is perceived as basically satisfactory. Conversely, if the outcomes fall below the CL (O < CL), the relationship is experienced as unsatisfactory.

Though this may seem like unnecessary quibbling about the "correct" way of incorporating the CL construct into the process of evaluating relationships, this criticism of the Lewis and Spanier equation is seen as necessary in that it is essential to a social exchange view of relationships to have a clear conceptualization of the role of the CL in the process of evaluating relationships. The CL is the standard against which the rewards and costs of participating in a relationship are judged. In the Lewis and Spanier formulation, one is left uncertain as to how the CL is being used as this comparative referent when the rewards and costs experienced are multiplied by the standard against which the rewards and costs are judged. This has the consequence of suggesting that rewards and costs are experienced independent of the CL, which is a serious departure from the social exchange paradigm.

In addition, the robust nature of the CL construct, when fully developed and utilized, helps the exchange theorist to deal with an important criticism of the exchange model. Specifically, it is often suggested that marriages evidence asymmetrical exchanges and different levels of rewards and costs. In other words, if one of the assumptions of the Theory of Interdependence is that rewards are distributed equitably, then how are the apparent asymmetries that are often observed in marriages accounted for?

One way of accounting for this is, as Lewis and Spanier suggest, to focus on the importance of anticipated future rewards and costs, as well as present or past ones. This is to suggest that when future forecasted rewards are perceived to be sufficiently high, couples are often willing to forego immediate rewards. In addition, we would suggest that a further elaboration of the CL construct helps to account for apparent relationship inequities.

Specifically, it is our contention that "observed" inequities are not necessarily "experienced" inequities if one takes into account the importance of the CL in the process of evaluating a relationship. (Note, the converse is also true, i.e., observed equity is not necessarily experienced as equity.) Observed differences in the rewards available to interactants may nonetheless be perceived by the interactants as fair if they have disparate CL's. For example, a wife staying at home with the children all the time while her husband has the freedom to socialize and recreate with friends several times a week may appear to be an inequity. The couple, however, may perceive this as fair if the behavior is consonant with their expectations. It would seem, here again, that the social exchange views of marriage relationships would benefit from a further elaboration and focus on the importance of the CL.

To their credit, Lewis and Spanier point out that individual levels of satisfaction and dyadic stability are capable of change over time. In their view, the degree of change in quality and stability is dependent upon changes occurring in the balance between the rewards

and costs on the intradyadic dimension, and the balance between the rewards and costs external to the dyad, respectively. This assertion, along with the proposition that higher marital quality is associated with greater marital stability leads to the conclusion that the lowering of the balance between the rewards and costs on the intradyadic dimension leads to an increase in the balance between rewards and costs external to the dyad. Two questions thus arise: What factors account for changes in the balance between the rewards and costs on the intradyadic dimension? and How do changes in marital quality, or the balance between the rewards and costs on the intradyadic dimension, lead to changes in marital stability? It would seem that a social exchange view of marital relationships would have to address these issues if exchange theory is to have relevance to the understanding of stability and change in relationships over the family life cycle.

Addressing the factors that potentially account for changes in the balance of rewards and costs on the intradyadic dimension first, the CL construct is seen again as central in importance. Consistent with the exchange paradigm, changes in satisfaction or outcomes over time may result from changes in the rewards and costs of participating in a relationship (holding constant one's CL), or by changes occurring in one's CL, i.e., changes in what one feels one deserves (holding constant the rewards and costs), or by changes occuring simultaneously in both rewards/costs and the CL. This is a necessary addition to an exchange model of marital relationships in that it allows for some way of understanding changes in perceived satisfactions derived from a relationship and the complexities involved in the process. In addition, this is an important aspect of any attempt to understand changes in perceptions of relationships over the course of the family life cycle, an area of concern we will deal with later.

As for the issue of how changes in marital quality lead to changes in stability, Lewis and Spanier seem to suggest that quality is only useful in understanding the decision to leave a relationship in that quality, when sufficiently high, makes it more difficult to find a more rewarding alternative. Implicit in this view is a heavy emphasis on rewards and costs, the assumption that one is constantly evaluating alternatives and that the availability/unavailability of alternatives determines one's commitment to the relationship.

It would seem that a view of the interrelationship between satisfaction or quality and stability more parsimonious with exchange theories by necesity must go beyond the focus on rewards/costs in relationships and alternatives to a focus on the evolution of marital interdependence and commitment. Essentially, the stance taken here is that a heavy emphasis on the balance between rewards and costs ignores a central characteristic of more involved relationships, i.e., they also seek to guarantee the continuance of rewards in a fair and equitable way by developing a sufficiently high level of relational interdependence. For example, the presence of altruistic behaviors, which are often thought to be uninterpretable from an exchange perspective (Nye, 1979), are understandable in an interdependent relationship in that they are a means of communicating a concern with one's partner's rewards and a desire to have relational rewards be fairly distributed in the future. In addition, the heavy focus on relational rewards and costs rather than relational

interdependence, sees relational commitment, i.e., the predisposition to continue or discontinue a relationship, as some function of the rewards available in alternative relationships which are continuously monitored over the course of a relationship. This strikes us as a rather limited view of commitment which leads us to explore the relationships between interdependence and commitment. The next section will examine these constructs from a social exchange perspective.

Interdependence and Commitment in Marriage

As noted above, the central focus of an exchange perspective of ongoing relationships is the construct of interdependence. This section examines this construct more closely. It will be our contention that future research and theory on social exchange and marital relationships will need to expand their focus from an emphasis on marital quality and stability to a focus on marital interdependence and stability. In addition, it will become clear that in order to more fully understand the relationships between marital interdependence and stability that the role of relational commitment needs to be further developed.

Social Exchange Views of Interdependence. Interdependence subsumes the presence of at least two individuals who have some investment in relating with each other. Kelley and Thibaut (1978), Leik and Leik (1977), and Scanzoni (1979) all suggest that with increased exposure and behavioral interactions there builds a sense of interdependece between the members of the dyadic relationship. With increased frequency and duration of relating there develops a sense of confidence and trust as demonstrated one to the other. Furthermore, with time, there develops a sense of consistency of relating so that one actor's behavior might appear to be predictable to the other. This predictability arises from relationship trust and actors' confidence in their "knowledge" of each other. With interdependence comes a sense of mutuality whereby decisions heretofore affecting the individual are now viewed as having dyadic impact. Their framework of day to day functioning is changed from individual to dyadic consideration and with this comes a focus upon the other and away from alternate relationship possibilities. With increased interdependence and mutuality there is an increased concentration on what each member can provide and obtain from his/her partner. Sources of satisfaction are perceived to be first within the relationship context and only when not fulfilled there, then outside of the relationship.

More specifically, what are the characteristics of interdependent relationships? In examining the social exchange literature, several relational characteristics were found relevant to the construct of interdependence. A brief outline of these follows:

1. Attractions or Satisfaction. Kelley and Thibaut (1978) and Scanzoni (1979) assert that in order for a relationship to move toward an interdependent exchange pattern, the rewards, both present and forecasted, need to be sufficiently high. How high is sufficiently high would seemingly be dependent upon a person's CL which would account for differences in what individuals find

rewarding and in the degree of rewards necessary for relational development. In terms of marital relationships, the assumption may be made that at some point in time, there was a sufficiently high level of attraction to justify the decision to marry. In addition, it would appear that a sufficiently high level of continued satisfaction is one of the factors that fosters continued interdependence.

2. Equity. Interdependence is fostered by the attraction or rewards participants derive from the relationship. But there is also an implication of distributive justice at work, and the concept of equity in relationships addresses the issue of justice. Equity here is defined by Adams (1965) as the perception that one's ratio of outcomes to inputs (rewards to costs) equals the outcome/input ratio of some other person with whom one has an exchange relationship. Inequity then is when the two sets of ratios are unequal and with inequity comes a feeling of injustice by one member towards the other.

   Equity theory has its research roots in studies by Walster, Berscheid, and Walster (1976). They state that individuals are selfish and tend to act according to their own self interests. If, however, they can gain through being equitable they will do so, although there is a constant drive towards maximizing rewards. In an interdependent relationship, however, the movement towards maximizing individual rewards is suppressed in that the greatest long term gains are obtained through maintaining equity. Inequity results in an unpleasant emotional state which may be alleviated by changing the level or perception of the input-outcome ratio, changing the perception of the other's input-outcome ratio, or searching for alternatives and, perhaps, leaving the relationship. It is clear, then, that concomitant with attempts to resolve inequity is often a weakening of the bonds of interdependence.

   It should be noted, as well, that consistent with the concept of equity in interpersonal relationships is the idea of perceived power residing in each member. In other words, while there is a commitment to the maintenance of equity in the interdependent relationship, there is also an implicit contract that power in the relationship will be shared or at least judiciously distributed across the dyad. In a balanced power relationship one could expect equal dyadic input in major decision making processes. There would be no feelings of one partner being manipulated or overwhelmed by the other. Power equity should allow for a sense of security, strength, and competency for each member of the relationship and hence foster relational interdependence.

3. Negotiation. Scanzoni (1979) calls attention to the importance of the process of negotiation in the expansion of relational interdependence. It is through the process of negotiation that the dyad reaches some consensus on the degree of their network of intermeshed or interdependent interests. Hence, it would seemingly follow that the formative stages of a relationship are characterized by excessive negotiations. Once a level of interdependence is agreed upon, the process of active relational negotiation would gradually diminish to the point where, with a

high degree of interdependence, negotiations would only be called into play when behaviors deviate considerably from those of routine living. Hence, in marital dyads, increases in the level of negotiations is seen as one factor calling into question the degree of relational interdependence.

4. Indebtedness. Indebtedness is similar to the concern with equity, yet it covers a unique aspect of a relationship. Specifically, indebtedness is concerned with an individual's motivation to act because of feelings of obligation. This obligated state rests on the assumption that there exists a "norm of reciprocity" which guides exchanges (Greenberg, 1980). Hence, in an interdependent relationship the experience of indebtedness by one partner results in efforts to remove the discomfort with this state which results in the other partner eventually becoming indebted in turn. As long as the norm of reciprocity is honored, indebtedness fosters interdependence by expanding participants' obligations to one another (Scanzoni, 1979). Changes in this reciprocal indebtedness, i.e., a skewing of this pattern, may subsequently signal a lowering of the level of relational interdependence.

5. Constraints/Barriers. Following the works of Levinger (1976) it would seem that an interdependent relationship is one in which there are sufficiently strong barriers to the dissolution of the relationship. Levinger's theoretical approach was drawn originally from Lewin's Field Theory of driving and restraining forces. Driving forces impel a person toward objects of positive valence and away from objects of negative valance. Working in conjunction with these are restraining forces which discourage an individual from leaving a situation. Levinger's theory suggests the existence of two types of "barriers", internal and external barriers, that work to foster interdependence, even if attraction is negative. Types of internal barriers are obligations to the marital bond and dependent children and moral prescriptions which encourage the view that marriage should be forever. External sources of constraint are primary group affiliations, community pressures, legal pressures, and material/economic considerations that foster interdependence by making the termination of a relationship too costly, socially or economically. It would seem that a weakening in either of these barriers to the dissolution of the relationship could possibly be accompanied by a lowering of the relational interdependence.

To summarize, dyadic interdependence is the central construct in a social exchange view of intimate relationships. Ongoing, intimate relationships are characterized by high levels of interdependence. High levels of relational interdependence are characterized, as outlined above, by high levels of relationship satisfaction, relationship equity, a negotiated and agreed upon definition of a relationship, reciprocal indebtedness, and the presence of internal and external barriers to the dissolution of the relationship. It is our contention that changes in these various indices of interdependence potentially create relationship stress. However, it is important to note that a change in one of these indices by no means necessarily lowers relational interdependence. For example, over time attractions may decline in a relationship, but individuals may still experience a satisfactory level of interdependence

resulting from the equity that exists, or the experience of indebtedness, and/or the barriers to the relationship dissolving being too great. Conversely, a large enough change in any one of these relational indicators may be sufficient to create stress for individuals in the dyad. It would seem, however, that the lowering of the level of interdependence experienced would have to go beyond some acceptable margin before the stress generated actually threatens the commitment one experiences to the relationship and ultimately the stability of the dyad. Attention is now directed to a social exchange view of relational commitment.

Social Exchange and Relational Commitment. In the preceding sections we have reviewed the social exchange literature on interpersonal attraction, marital quality and stability, and relational interdependence. This was done in an attempt to begin the process of building a social exchange model of relational stability and change applicable to an understanding of the changes that occur in marriage [illegible] the family life cycle. Throughout this review, the stability/instability of a given relationship was repeatedly thought to be accounted for by the degree of relational interdependence or quality experienced and the availability of alternatives perceived as more or less rewarding than the relationship. Another way of stating this is that relational quality or interdependence has only an indirect, rather than a direct, impact on relational stability in that people constantly look for alternatives and it is only for the fact that better alternatives are relatively difficult to locate that relationships remain stable.

The assertions that people continuously search for alternatives and that relational interdependence only indirectly impacts on stability strikes us as too simplistic for two reasons. First of all, people often appear to be uninterested in searching for alternative relationships. In addition, it only makes sense that there exists some relationship between the quality and/or interdependence of a relationship and the stability of the relationship other than to suggest that if these are satisfactorily high, the location of a better alternative is more difficult. In other words, what mediates between the interdependence of a relationship and the stability of the relationship? Is stability simply based upon the unavailability of alternatives? Do people always monitor alternatives and if not what activates this monitoring? To address these questions, we found ourselves examining the construct of relational commitment. It will be our contention that when fully developed theoretically, commitment will serve as an important construct linking relational interdependence and stability.

In examining the social psychological literature on the construct of commitment, we find that it is often a term loosely used to account for the stability of relationships. For example, several authors, in writing about relational interdependence, assert that the expansion of interdependence is associated with a higher commitment to the relationship (e.g., Scanzoni, 1979; Levinger, 1982). This points out the common sense tendency to think of commitment as either a mediator or indicator of relationship stability. However, theoretically, what commitment is or why and how it serves as an indicator of or variable mediating stability is seldom fully addressed. To this end, we examined the social exchange literature for some insight into the construct of commitment, what it is and how it functions as a

mediator of relationship stability. A brief review of some of the major works that add to the diverse interpretations of commitment will support the need for a more all-inclusive approach to this concept and its role in dyadic relationships such as marriage.

In a model of relationship development, Leik and Leik (1977) propose that commitment is the greatest level of involvement that a dyad can attain. They describe commitment as "an unwillingness to consider any exchange partner other than that of the current relationship (1977, pp. 301-302)." Further, Leik and Leik see commitment as an "absorbing state", whereby strict economic exchange principles are foresworn in favor of a relationship where rewards may be future-placed and not directly attributable to costs. For these authors, marriage represents the highest level of commitment and is considered to represent a time when monitoring of alternative relationships has for all intents, ceased. For Leik and Leik then, commitment represents an end stage of relationship development, with the relationship maturing from strict exchange to increased confidence in each other and finally to the trust or faith in each other, which Leik and Leik say represents commitment. Another way of viewing this would be to suggest that a necessary concomitant of interdependence is commitment which involves the decision to cease monitoring alternatives.

In a manner similar to Leik and Leik, Scanzoni (1979) depicts behavioral interdependence as following three stage levels of development, from exploration to expansion to commitment. Commitment here is defined as the degree to which a person feels solidarity with or cohesion with an association. When the level of inputs in a relationship is high, the duration of inputs lengthy, and the level of inputs consistent, the degree of relational solidarity experienced is also high and hence commitment is considered great. Commitment and interdependence thus feed off of each other thereby helping to maintain the relationship.

Scanzoni's view of commitment differs from Leik and Leik's, however, in that he sees marriage not as a time when alternatives are not monitored, but rather sees commitment as an advanced form of relational interdependence in which the dyad has successfully negotiated and balanced their long and short term goals and interests. These goals and interests then become mutually beneficial in that the relationship is enhanced through dyadic commitment to these concerns. Thus, commitment contributes to relational interdependence, but neither commitment nor interdependence alone account for stability in that alternatives are always monitored, although at times not actively "tested". This assertion that couples continue to actively monitor their alternatives is in direct contrast to Leik and Leik's notion that, with commitment, comparisons of alternatives is greatly diminished.

Levinger (1974) proposes that commitment is a transitional stage in the formation of a relationship that mediates the decisions to form, maintain, or discontinue a relationship. According to Levinger, commitment is signified by a pledge or contract that one will try to enhance the other's outcomes and that one is willing to decrease the attractiveness of competing alternatives through nonattendance to them. Thus, the decision to form or continue a relationship is based upon the presence of negotiated contracts which signal the

interdependence of the dyad and the unwillingness to consider alternatives. Levinger and Snoek (1972) call these contracts "private barriers" to relationship dissolution. Concomitant with these private barriers are external barriers that work against the dissolution of the relationship, such as the contractual commitment of an engagement or marriage, which provide reinforcement for the pair to be seen as a mutually interdependent unit, hence making the dissolution of the dyad costly. Relationships are typically maintained, in Levinger's view, through a balance in the sources of commitment to the relationship, which are the internal and external barriers to the dissolution of the relationship. Hence commitment is a characteristic of an interdependent relationship, but also serves as a factor mediating the stability of the relationship by increasing the costs of dissolution and encouraging the mutual nonattendance to alternatives.

Thus, a review of the social exchange views of commitment suggests that commitment functions as a mediator of relationship stability. However, how it mediates stability is seen differently by the authors reviewed. As suggested by Leik and Leik and by Levinger, commitment mediates stability by curtailing the amount of monitoring of alternatives that occurs. In addition, Levinger's work seems to suggest that commitment also mediates stability by covarying with the evolution of internal and external barriers which function to increase the costs of dissolving a relationship. Hence, high commitment positively covaries with high stability by curtailing monitoring of alternatives and concomitantly increasing the costs of dissolution.

Scanzoni also sees commitment as a mediator of relationship stability. For Scanzoni, commitment is an affective state--one in which an individual experiences feelings of solidarity and cohesion with their association. Commitment mediates stability by expanding the degree of relational interdependence that exists, thereby increasing the experience of relational cohesion. Scanzoni takes exception to the view that monitoring stops when high levels of commitment are reached, however, calling attention to the disadvantages and the potential for exploitation that could result from such a decision. Thus, he believes that the market of alternatives is always available, or in people's awareness. However, Scanzoni adds that the market of alternatives is not always tested.

The assertion by Scanzoni that monitoring never ceases, while the active, or actual, testing of alternatives does, strikes us as an attempt to compromise the position taken by Leik and Leik by maintaining that the degree of active monitoring or testing covaries with commitment, though it never reaches the point of no attention to alternatives. We tend to support this view and would suggest that a social exchange definition of commitment by necessity must therefore include two central components:

1. An affective component comprised of feelings of solidarity and cohesion which can vary from low solidarity and cohesion (low commitment) to high solidarity and cohesion (high commitment).

2. A process component which refers to the degree of active monitoring of alternatives which can vary from high active monitoring and testing of alternatives (low commitment) to low

active monitoring and no testing of alternatives (high commitment).

In addition, we would stress the apparent relationship between both interdependence and the degree of commitment experienced and the degree of commitment experienced and the stability of relationships. This suggests that commitment potentially functions as an important dynamic mediator between relational interdependence and stability by providing feedback to interactants about the level of cohesion and solidarity experienced, the rewards potentially available in alternative relationships and the costs of dissolving the relationship. This view of commitment as a feedback mechanism mediating interdependence and stability is the focus of the next section.

Interdependence, Commitment, and Stability: A Feedback Model

Our intention in this section is to explore the role of commitment as a dynamic mediator of relational interdependence and stability. It has been our contention throughout that social exchange theories of ongoing relationships need to address the interrelationship between interdependence and stability/instability. For the most part, exchange views propose what we would call an indirect relationship between these variables, i.e., satisfactory rewards derived from an ongoing relationship make it more difficult to find a more satisfactory alternative. It is the view expressed here that the relationship between interdependence and stability is more complex. To this end, the construct of relational commitment, when fully developed, seems to point to a more dynamic relationship between these variables.

Before exploring this relationship further, however, a cautionary note is needed. It is important to recognize that actual relationship stability/instability, from a social exchange perspective, is based upon the presence of a better alternative accompanied by the relatively low cost of dissolving the existing relationship. The view taken here is that the level of commitment experienced, i.e., the degree of relational cohesion experienced and the degree to which alternatives are more or less actively monitored, at best is related to the tendency toward instability. In other words, the experience of low commitment is thought to be related to the tendency toward relational instability in that alternatives are actively being monitored. Actual instability, however, is contingent upon the results of the monitoring, i.e., on the presence of or location of an actual alternative. Hence, commitment serves as an important feedback mechanism providing information about the level of relational interdependence experienced and the potential for rewards that exists in alternative relationships or states (e.g., being single can be perceived as more rewarding than being married). As such, low commitment can only be related to the tendency toward instability, while actually leaving the relationships is contingent upon the presence ot more desirable alternatives.

In addition, for the ease of discussion, the assumption is made throughout the remainder of this section that at the point of marriage a couple has arrived at a negotiated and agreed upon level

of interdependence that is usually accompanied by a relatively high level of commitment. This is not meant to suggest that commitment or interdependence does not vary at the point of marriage, for certainly they do. The view expressed here is that for some people the decision to marry is based upon a relatively low level of interdependence and commitment whereby the monitoring of alternatives remains quite high. However, this is seen as more of an exception rather than the rule. Thus, for the sake of simplicity, the following discussion of stability and change makes the assumption that newly formed marital dyads are highly interdependent and committed and thus tend towards relational stability.

As can be seen from the above discussion, the metaphor used to describe the role of commitment is that of a feedback mechanism. Essentially, our thinking here has been guided by the systems literature addressing the role of feedback processes in fostering or counteracting change (e.g., Kantor & Lehr, 1975; Hoffman, 1980). Systems theorists suggest that stability and change within systems are accounted for by feedback mechanisms which are change promoting (morphogenesis) or change resisting (morphostasis). The issue of whether a system needs to change is activated by members' deviation from previously agreed upon behavioral prescriptions and rules of relating. These deviations activate information processing which feeds back to members the feasibility and necessity of change. Morphostasis refers to the process whereby the system resists change by maintaining the status quo. Morphogenesis refers to the process whereby the information processed by the system results in the system deviating from the prescribed norms of the past. When deviations from the norms are great and changes cannot be successfully negotiated, systems are then apt to dissolve.

The view of commitment expressed here is that it serves as a feedback mechanism. Essentially, the marital dyad once having arrived at a negotiated and agreed upon level of interdependence can be viewed as a stable system. Mutually negotiated levels of interdependence, characterized by high levels of attraction, equity, reciprocal indebtedness, and the development of internal and external barriers to the dissolution of the relationship, are accompanied by a relatively high level of commitment. The level of commitment is reflected in the members of the dyad experiencing high levels of cohesion and solidarity and engaging in relatively low levels of alternative monitoring. The experience of relatively high levels of commitment thus, in turn, provides feedback or information to the dyad about the level of their interdependence.

The high levels of interdependence and commitment would thus seemingly be related to a tendency toward relational stability in that the level of monitoring of alternatives is low and the rewards derived from the relationship high. It is important to note, however, that monitoring never completely ceases. Hence, it is possible for a highly interdependent and committed relationship to become unstable if a better alternative is located. It seems that the actual dissolution of such relationships would rarely occur, however, because of the high levels of rewards present in the relationship and the high cost of leaving it.

In addition, it is possible to discuss the interrelationships between interdependence, commitment, and stability when changes occur in

levels of relational interdependence. The position expressed here is that some agreed upon and satisfactory level of interdependence, accompanied by an appropriate level of commitment, usually precedes the decision to marry. However, it is possible over the career of the relationships, for the level of interdependence experienced in a relationship to vary. These variations may result from changes in the satisfaction derived from the relationship, changes in the equity and/or indebtedness experienced, from renewed attempts to renegotiate the relationship, and/or from a weakening of the internal and external barriers to dissolving the relationship. This is to suggest that changes in relational interdependence may result from many different avenues. The issue explored here is, what is the relationship between changes in relational interdependence, commitment, and stability?

Central to this discussion is the premise that commitment serves as a feedback mechanism and that changes in the level of relational interdependence, calling attention to the deviations from the preexisting norms, result in a readjustment in the level of commitment. Changes in the level of commitment result in a lowering of the level of dyadic cohesion experienced and an increase in the amount of alternative monitoring. As such, this change in the level of commitment provides feedback to the dyad about the changes in the level of interdependence and provides more information than was present before about alternatives available in that the monitoring of alternatives becomes more active. In other words, it is postulated that changes in levels of relational interdependence, deviations from pre-existing norms, signal the need to obtain more information about the relationship and its alternatives. Thus information processing is activated by the lowering of the feelings of relational cohesion, which are called into question by changes in relational interdependence, which is accompanied by an increase in the level of alternative monitoring. It is important to note, however, that the degree of change in the level of interdependence that results in a change in the level of commitment cannot be clearly specified. In particular, this is because all systems seemingly have a tolerance for deviation and ambiguity, a morphostatic margin. Consequently, deviation from the norms will need to be sufficiently large before change is contemplated.

Hence, the contention above is that changes in relational interdependence signal a lowering of commitment which activates an increase in alternative monitoring. It is suggested here that the results of this monitoring have important implications for the types of changes attempted by the dyad and consequently address the issue of stability and change.

Essentially, it appears that there are three different types of information that can be gathered from the active monitoring of alternatives. One consequence of high monitoring may be the discovery that no better alternatives exist. This information, however, may have different consequences for the dyad. In one instance, the members of the dyad may attempt a renegotiation of their relationship, hence adjusting or readjusting their level of interdependence in a mutually agreed upon way. This apparently, if successfully accomplished, would signal an end to the monitoring and restabilize the dyad. However, if the renegotiation is unsuccessful, or if no attempt is made to renegotiate the relationship, the level of

interdependence and commitment will remain low. As monitoring remains high in this instance, the dyad may be thought of as tending toward instability in that the location of a better alternative could possibly result in the relationship dissolving.

Alternatively, a possible result of active monitoring is the discovery that a better alternative is available, but that the costs of dissolving the relationship remain high. In such an instance, individuals may again renegotiate their relationship and deactivate their monitoring, or may continue monitoring in the hopes of finding a relationship that is rewarding enough to justify the costs of dissolving the marriage. If the renegotiation is successful, as before, the dyad is restabilized. If the monitoring continues, the tendency toward instability remains high as only the costs of dissolving the relationship keep it intact.

Finally, active monitoring may result in the discovery of a better alternative and that the costs of dissolving the relationship are relatively low. In this instance, the tendency towards instability is greatest in that there is relatively little to be gained by renegotiating the relationship.

In summary, the view presented here is that commitment serves as an important variable mediating between the degree of interdependence experienced within a relationship and the stability of the relationship. A high level of relational commitment provides information to the dyad about their level of cohesion and solidarity, which is a necessary component of interdependence, and also minimizes the tendency towards instability in that the monitoring of alternatives is curtailed. Low levels of interdependence, or changes in relational interdependence, signal the need to reconsider dyadic participation which is accompanied by lower feelings of dyadic cohesion and higher levels of alternative monitoring. In this way, the commitment construct is directly tied to the relational interdependence construct. In addition, commitment is seen as a mediator of relational stability in that the information gathered through the process of actively monitoring alternatives is essential to the decision to restabilize or dissolve the relationship.

Marital Cohesion and Family Life Transitions

Our interest in the relationship between family life transitions and marital cohesiveness began with us asking the question: Why do some relationships endure over time, often in spite of low levels of satisfaction, while others do not? By way of exploring this issue, we became interested in the social exchange theories of marital relationships. The position taken throughout this paper has been that the social exchange views of marital relationships have not adequately dealt with the issues of stability and change in relationships. It is suggested that only by focusing on the construct of relational interdependence and by viewing commitment as a feedback mechanism, can a more dynamic and comprehensive social exchange model of relational cohesion be developed. The development of such a model is seen as essential to any attempt to examine, from a social exchange perspective, the impact of family life transitions on marital cohesion.

Marital Interdependence and Family Life Transitions.

Essentially, any normative event that occurs over the family life cycle has the potential for changing the degree of relational interdependence experienced within a marriage. This change in the level of interdependence may result from changes in the established exchange patterns of the relationship, shifts in the perception of the rewards derived from the relationship and/or shifts in the expectations for the relationship. Such changes, in other words, possibly impact on relational interdependence by changing the satisfaction with the relationhsip, the equity and/or indebtedness experienced in the relationship, by potentially requiring some renegotiation of the relationship, or by changing the internal and external barriers to the dissolution of the relationship.

For example, the transition to parenthood carries with it many oridinary difficulties that can potentially affect relational interdependence. The childbearing years have often been associated with a decrease in marital satisfaction. They also may require some renegotiation of the relationship exchange patterns in order to guarantee that the rewards and costs of parenthood be equitably distributed. The transition to parenthood carries with it a change in the parents' investments in their relationship which also may impact on what individuals feel they deserve from the relationship. In other words, there are a variety of ways in which, speculatively speaking, the transition to parenthood may impact on relational interdependence.

It is important to note, in addition, that for some couples the degree of interdependence experienced, though perhaps weakened somewhat from the lower satisfaction derived from the marriage per se, may remain stable or even be enhanced by the strengthening of the barriers to the dissolution of the relationship that may result from the presence of children. At this point it is much too simplistic to suggest that a change in one factor affecting interdependence actually signals a shift in relational interdependence without some consideration of the other factors that contribute to a relationship being experienced as interdependent. The failure to take these multitude of factors into consideration may be one of the factors that accounts for the failure to find a clear link between marital satisfaction and marital stability.

Hence, the basic conclusion advanced here is that any normative, and certainly non-normative, family life event has the potential of changing the level of relational interdependence experienced. If this shift in interdependence is sufficiently large, concomitant shifts in the level of relational commitment and stability may occur.

Commitment, Stability, and the Family Life Cycle

In order for a family life transition to impact on marital cohesion, a sufficiently large shift in relational interdependence must occur

resulting in a concomitant shift in the degree of relational commitment experienced. A lowering in the experience of relational commitment carries with it a decrease in the feelings of relational cohesion and solidarity and an increase in the extent to which alternatives are monitored. Consistent with the feedback model of commitment outlined above, commitment is hypothesized to serve as a dynamic mediator of both relational interdependence and cohesion. In this way, the lowering of the level of relational interdependence, resulting from some shifts in the exchange pattern of relating, covaries with a decrease in the commitment to the relationship experienced. This lowering of commitment threatens the stability of the dyad in that relationship alternative monitoring becomes more active. However, the decision to actually leave the relationship is contingent upon a better alternative actually being located and, in addition, the cost of dissolving the relationship being sufficiently low.

In this way, any family life transition may threaten the stability of a marital relationship. In order for this to occur, however, the degree of relational interdependence and commitment derived from the relationship needs to be sufficiently altered to result in an increase in the active monitoring of alternatives. The monitoring of alternatives per se does not result in the disruption of the marriage relationship, however, as a better alternative first needs to be located and the costs of dissolving the relationship need to be sufficiently low before the termination of the relationship can occur. As outlined above, when the costs of terminating a relationship are found to be too costly, or if a better alternative cannot be located, individuals are faced with the option of renegotiating their exchange pattern, thereby restoring relational interdependence, or continuing their active monitoring of alternatives.

In conclusion, social exchange theories of attraction, marital quality, and stability and relational commitment were examined as to the insight they provided into the difficulties encountered by marital theorists and researchers in accounting for marital cohesion. In exploring this literature, the conclusion was advanced that the constructs of relational interdependence and commitment have been overlooked by the exchange theories of marital relationships in their attempts to focus on the issues of marital rewards, quality, and stability. An attempt has been made to evolve a social exchange perspective on relational cohesion focusing in particular on the theoretical interrelationships between interdependence, commitment, and cohesion. This exchange perspective focuses on the role of commitment as a feedback mechanism providing information about both the level of relational interdependence and the potential for rewards in alternative relationships.

In this regard, we realize that we have not spent a great deal of time addressing the impact of family life transitions on marital cohesion. It was felt that in order to address this issue from a social exchange perspective, we first needed to "come to grips" with a social exchange perspective on relationship cohesion. It is our contention that such an exchange perspective readily points to the potential impacts that any normative or non-normative family life event may have on relational interdependence, commitment, and cohesion.

References

Adams, J. Inequity in social exchange. In L. Berkowitz (Eds.), Advances in experimental social psychology (Vol. 2). New York: Academic Press, 1965.

Blau, P. M. Exchange and power in social life. New York: Wiley, 1964.

Greenberg, M. S. A theory of indebtedness. In K. J. Gergen, M. S. Greenberg, & R. H. Willis (Eds.), Social exchange: Advances in theory and research. New York: Plenum Press, 1980.

Hatfield, E., Utne, M. K., & Traupmann, J. Equity theory and intimate relationships. An R. L. Burgess & T. L. Huston (Eds.), Social exchange in developing relationships. New York: Academic Press, 1979.

Hoffman, L. The family life cycle and discontinuous change. An E. A. Carter & M. McGoldrick (Eds.), The family life cycle: A framework for family therapy. New York: Gardner Press, 1980.

Homans, G. G. Social behavior: Its elementary forms. New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1961/1974.

Huesmann, L., & Levinger, G. Incremental exchange theory: A formal model for progression in dyadic social interaction. In L. Berkowitz & E. Walster (Eds.), Advances in experimental social psychology (Vol. 9). New York: Academic Press, 1976.

Kantor, D., & Lehr, W. Inside the family. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1975.

Kelley, H. Interpersonal accommodation. American Psychologist, 1968, 399-410.

Kelley, H., & Thibaut, J. Interpersonal relations: A theory of interdependence. New York: Wiley, 1978.

Leik, R., & Leik, S. Transition to interpersonal commitment. In R. Hamblin & J. Kunkel (Eds.), Behavioral theory in sociology. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 1977.

Levinger, G. A social exchange view on the dissolution of pair relationships. In R. Burgess & T. Huston (Eds.), Social exchange in developing relationships. New York: Academic Press, 1979. Also printed in Nye (Ed.), Family relationships: Rewards and costs, 1982.

Levinger, G. A three-level approach to attraction: Toward an understanding of pair relatedness. In T. Huston (Eds.), Foundations of interpersonal attraction. New York: Academic Press, 1974.

Levinger, G. The embrace of lives: Changing and unchanging. In G. Levinger & H. Raush (Eds.), Close relationships: Perspectives on the meaning of intimacy. Amherst: University of Massachusetts

Press, 1977.

Levinger, G., & Huesmann, L. An "incremental exchange" perspective on the pair relationship: Interpersonal reward and level of involvement. In K. J. Gergen, M. S. Greenberg, & R. H. Willis (Eds.), Social exchange: Advances in theory and research. New York: Plenum, 1980.

Levinger, G., & Snoek, J. Attraction in relationships: A new look at interpersonal attraction. Morristown, NJ: General Learning Press, 1972.

Lewis, R. A., & Spanier, G. B. Marital quality, marital stability, and social exchange. In F. I. Nye (Eds.), Family relations: Rewards and costs. Beverly Hills: Sage, 1982.

Lewis, R. A., & Spanier, G. B. Theorizing about the quality and stability of marriage. In W. R. Burr, R. Hill, F. I. Nye, & I. L. Reiss (Eds.), Contemporary theories about the family (Vol. 2). New York: The Free Press, 1979.

March, J. G. Making artists out of pedants. In R. M. Stogdill (Ed.), The process of model-building in the behavioral sciences. Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1970.

Nye, F. I. The basic theory. In F. I. Nye (Ed.), Family relations: Rewards and costs. Beverly Hills: Sage, 1982.

Nye, F. I. Choice, exchange, and the family. In W. R. Burr et al. (Eds.), Contemporary theories about the family (Vol. 2). New York: The Free Press, 1979.

Roloff, M. E. Interpersonal communication: The social exchange approach. Beverly Hills: Sage, 1981.

Sabatelli, R. M. The methodological implications of social exchange: The marital comparison level index. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the National Conference on Family Relations, Milwaukee, WI, October 1981.

Scanzoni, J. Social exchange and behavioral interdependence. In R. Burgess & T. Huston (Eds.), Social exchange in developing relationships. New York: Academic Press, 1979.

Thibaut, J. W., & Kelley, H. H. The social psychology of groups. New York: Wiley, 1959.

Walster, E., Berscheid, E., & Walster, G. New directions in equity research. In L. Berkowitz & E. Walster (Eds.), Equity theory: Toward a general theory of social interaction, advances in experimental social psychology (Vol. 9). New York: Academic Press, 1976.